



SHHS STUDIES

A SPECIAL REPORT SERIES BY THE N.C. DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES, DIVISION OF
HEALTH SERVICES, STATE CENTER FOR HEALTH STATISTICS, P.O. BOX 2091, RALEIGH, N.C. 27602

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OCT 18 1988

No. 46

September, 1988

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A DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF HOUSEFIRE DEATHS IN NORTH CAROLINA

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ABSTRACT

Medical Examiner Investigation Reports dealing with housefire deaths in 1985 were linked to the Fire Marshal Investigation Reports. The study population totaled 200 deaths, representing 159 housefires. The overall housefire death rate in North Carolina was 3.2 per 100,000 population. Persons aged 65 and over had the highest age-specific death rate (8.4 per 100,000) and nonwhite males had the highest race-sex-specific death rate (7.1 per 100,000). Eighty-three percent of the decedents who died at the scene of the fire and were tested for carbon monoxide were determined to have died as a result of carbon monoxide poisoning. Thirty-three percent of the decedents died in fires started by heating units and 26% in fires started by smoking materials. Woodstoves and kerosene heaters caused the fires which accounted for more than half of the heating-related fire deaths. Of the decedents aged 15 and older, 56% had blood alcohol concentrations of .10% or greater. Decedents in cooking-related housefires had the highest percentage of intoxicated victims (85%) followed by decedents in smoking-related housefires (60%). The results of this study document the importance of providing automatic protection from injuries by modifying the environment to reduce housefire mortality in North Carolina.